



October 27, 2000

Ms. Sarajane Milligan
Assistant County Attorney
Harris County, Texas
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002-1700

OR2000-4171

Dear Ms. Milligan:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act, chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID # 141267.

The Harris County Precinct Four Constable (the "constable") received a request for a specific offense report. You inform us that front page information has been provided to the requestor. You claim that the rest of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.

Section 552.108 of the Government Code, the "law enforcement exception," provides in relevant part that "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime is excepted from [required public disclosure] if ... release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body claiming an exception to disclosure under section 552.108 must reasonably explain, if the responsive information does not do so on its face, how and why section 552.108 is applicable. *See Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977); Open Records Decision No. 434 at 2-3 (1986). In this instance, you inform us that the detail report that you seek to withhold relates to a pending criminal prosecution. You have submitted an affidavit from an assistant district attorney for Harris County that confirms your assertion. Based on your representations, the affidavit, and our review of the submitted offense report, we find that its release would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1); Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.--Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559

(Tex. 1976) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases); *see also* Open Records Decision Nos. 372 at 4 (1983) (stating that any proper custodian of information relating to an incident involving allegedly criminal conduct that is under active investigation or prosecution may invoke section 552.108); 216 at 3 (1978) (noting law enforcement interests delineated in *Houston Chronicle*). Therefore, we conclude that the requested offense report is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108(a)(1).

We note, however, that section 552.108 does not except from public disclosure “basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime.” Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). Section 552.108(c) requires the release of the kind of information that is considered to be basic front-page offense and arrest report information, including a detailed description of the offense, even if that information does not actually appear on the front page of the report. *See Houston Chronicle*, 531 S.W.2d at 186-87; Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing the types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). The rest of the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. As we are able to make a determination under section 552.108, we need not address your claim under section 552.103.¹

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one

¹We note, however, that a successful claim under section 552.103 generally does not except from disclosure the same basic information that must be released under section 552.108(c). *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 597 (1991), 362 (1983).

of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.W. Morris, III', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/seg

Ref: ID# 141267

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Richard M. Maroney
8211 Lichen Lane
Spring, Texas 77379
(w/o enclosures)